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SUBJECT: CONGRESSMAN CROWLEY MEETS WITH JAMAAT ISLAMI

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Congressman Crowley and embassy officials met with JI's top leadership including Amir Nizami. Crowley noted JI's contributions in counter terrorism, asked JI to promote respect for minority rights, sought avoidance of election violence and intimidation, raised corruption issues, and asked for JI's support of a revamped UN Human Rights Commission. Nizami said that JI is committed to fighting terrorism, declared reports of BDG religious intolerance as misinformation, allayed concerns of election violence, and denied reports of corruption in Bangladesh. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On February 22, Congressman Joe Crowley met with Jamaat Islami's (JI) Amir and Bangladesh Minister of Industries Motiur Rahman Nizami. JI Senior Assistant Secretary General Muhammad Kamaruzzman, Assistant Secretary

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General Abdur Razzaq, Robin Roizman, professional staff member on the Committee on International Relations, Charge d'Affaires, control officer, and poloff (note taker) were also present for the 45 minute meeting.

¶3. (SBU) Nizami welcomed Crowley saying that Bangladesh is a democracy that is committed to fighting terrorism, seeks communal harmony, and constitutionally does not discriminate on the basis of religion and therefore respects all religions. Despite this, he said, there are criticisms that the BDG does not respect religions. Nizami said Crowley's visit would "help remove this misinformation."

¶4. (SBU) Crowley acknowledged the BDG's efforts in fighting terrorism, noted that while the majority rules, it must also protect minorities, and expressed concern for the coming elections.

¶5. (SBU) Nizami said that since the BDG won its democracy through armed struggle, it values and protects what it has won. Bangladesh has successfully held three elections under its unique caretaker system, each time ensuring free and fair elections. This experience means the next election "is going to be more free and fair as it will be a more mature system." This system, he added, permitted the Awami League to come to power.

¶6. (SBU) Crowley said that intimidation and the threat of student violence during elections is an issue. Nizami and his colleagues responded that there is less violence in Bangladesh than in neighboring countries, and that the army will keep violence at bay so "we are not unduly concerned."

¶7. (SBU) Nizami responded to Crowley's concern about corruption saying that "we are looking into the matter." Crowley pressed for some movement on the issue, adding that corruption reports such as those from Transparency International (TI) make Bangladesh ineligible for funding from the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). With the potential reduction in USAID foreign assistance, the BDG could be doubly disadvantaged. Nizami said that there "is no corruption" in Bangladesh, that TI does not use "authentic" information as its research is based only on newspaper reporting, and that as "propaganda" the TI report can't be accepted.

¶8. (SBU) Crowley responded by raising the issue of a recent tender for police radios where Motorola should be the successful bidder, but now the tender may be reissued. He noted that such practices should change, and asked for some "discernible movement" on corruption, adding that the BDG has demonstrated its ability to address other difficult issues such as trafficking in persons and child labor. Nizami replied that the BDG has indeed taken a practical approach to child labor issues by paying poor families for their children's attendance in school.

¶9. (SBU) The CDA asked Nizami how many seats JI would seek in the next election and how the recent JMB bombings might affect the election. Nizami said that JI plans to stay with the BNP/JI alliance and will do better in the next election. As for JMB, Nizami and others said that the BDG has "destroyed JMB's network" and as a result, the JMB has no popular support, is not able to launch any attacks, and the JMB storm "is over." Asked about the continued popularity of Bangla Bhai, Nizami and others said that Bangla Bhai is popular so long as leftist extremists continue launching their attacks, but JMB's true agenda is to tarnish Islam and

DHAKA 00001109 002 OF 002

create instability in BDG by creating confusion amongst Muslims.

¶10. (SBU) Crowley replied that JI has a public relations problem. Many people view JI as an extremist fundamentalist organization. "While it's an image you may not care about, there is a growing perception on the Hill, that extremists are taking hold" here in Bangladesh. Razzaq told the delegation that JMB's aim is not the same as JI's. "They want to kill judges" he said, adding, "don't rely on press reports."

¶11. (SBU) Crowley asked Nizami about JI's stance towards the UN Human Right Commission, adding that it would be good for JI to support strongly the HRC. Razzaq responded that "we are for it" but it is an issue that is not seen as directly affecting Bangladesh.

¶12. (U) This cable was cleared by Congressman Crowley.
CHAMMAS